

THE JOYOUS RETURN

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A SERMON

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“O Israel, return unto the Lord your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, You are our gods: for in You the fatherless find mercy.”
Hosea 14:1-3.

WE are in the last chapter of the book of the prophet Hosea. Throughout the book there has been thunder; sometimes a low rumbling, as of a distant tempest, sometimes peal on peal, as of a storm immediately overhead. And now the tempest has gathered all its force. Here it culminates. You expect the bolt of heaven to destroy. Lo, instead thereof a silver shower of mercy! The gentle drops come down plenteously, and you hear their fall upon the tender herb like music soft and low. God does not say, “O Israel, depart accursed!” But instead thereof, in dulcet tones He cries, “O Israel, return unto the Lord your God.” In the midst of wrath He remembers mercy—

*“When God’s right arm is bared for war,
And thunders clothe His cloudy car,”*

even then He stays His uplifted hand, reins in the steeds of vengeance, and holds communion with grace, “for His mercy endures forever,” and “judgment is His strange work.”

To use another figure; the whole book of Hosea is like a great trial wherein witnesses have appeared against the accused, and the arguments and excuses of the guilty have been answered and baffled. All has been heard for them, and much, very much against them, and the convicted stand at the bar to hear their sentence. Behold the Judge, instead of putting on the black cap to pronounce doom of death, stretches out His hands to the condemned, and, in tones of pity cries, “O Israel, return”!

This is a wonderful chapter to be at the end of such a book. I had never expected from such a prickly shrub to gather so fair a flower, so sweet a fruit, but so it is; where sin abounded, grace does much more abound. No chapter in the Bible can be more rich in mercy than this last of Hosea, and yet no chapter in the Bible might, in the natural order of things, have been more terrible in judgement. Where we looked for the blackness of darkness, behold a noontide of light!

While I am preaching from such a text, I feel the need of special help from the Holy Spirit. I lift up my heart for it. Will you not, my brethren, pray for me, that my hearers may not only hear my voice, but may perceive the inward voice of God speaking to their hearts! The Lord Himself is the speaker of the text; it is Jehovah who says, “O Israel, return.” May many of you hear the voice of God, and in that voice perceive an over-powering omnipotence which shall turn your thoughts and souls into the right way, making you willing in the day of His power!

I ask you to consider, first, *the call to come to God*, “O Israel, return unto the Lord your God,” and, secondly, *the argument for coming*, “For you have fallen by your iniquity.” Thirdly, we shall dwell upon *the help in coming* which the Lord gives to those who are willing to obey. He says, “Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.” In conclusion, we shall pray to see in many *the coming by this help*. May my unconverted hearers return unto the Lord, and know the power of His restoring grace!

I. First, notice THE CALL TO COME, “O Israel, return unto the Lord your God.” Oh, that the call may be made effectual this day!

It is a very instructive call, for it tells the sinner exactly what he has to do. Return; that is, reverse your course. The course you have taken is the opposite of that which you ought to have taken; therefore, come back. You have gone from God; come back to God. You have been prayerless; begin to pray! You have been hardened; yield to the Word. You have been full of quibbling; believe even as a little child. Bring forth fruits meet for repentance and not the fruits of obstinate persistence in evil. To many there could be no better direction in spiritual morals than this word, "Return." Do what you have not done; leave undone what you have been doing. Reverse the engine. Take the other track! "Return!" is but a single word, but that word is full of meaning. There is to be a change, a total change, a coming back to God.

The word is also instructive, because it says, "Return unto the Lord." Do not only *look* to God, but *return* to Him. Arise, and go unto your Father. Do not think about it, but do it. Do not return part of the way to this and to that good custom and salutary habit, but come right back to the Lord, and rest not till you feel that you are in His arms. It is of no use for the prodigal to say, "I will arise," unless he adds, "and go to my father." It is of no use his quitting one far-off country for another, but it must be said of him, "And he arose and came to his father." The best direction we can give to many a sinner is—Reverse your course of life, and let your reversed course of life lead you to God Himself. How surely will he need the abounding grace of God for such a work as this! For Virgil's lines are true—

*"The gates of hell are open night and day;
Smooth the descent, and easy is the way.
But to return, and seek the upper skies,
In this the task and mighty labor lies."*

The call is very practical. It does not ask for sentiment, but for action; "O Israel, return unto the Lord your God." Do not, as I have said before, think of it merely, but resolutely and thoughtfully return. Do not speculate about when you will do it; let it be done now. Procrastinate no longer; quit halting and hesitating once for all. Cease to count the loss or the gain of it, but take the decisive step, "O Israel, return."

I cannot help reminding you that this instructive and practical exhortation is also *a very pathetic call*. The "O" with which it commences is not used as an oratorical embellishment. Loving entreaty breathes in it. He who speaks is in earnest, and pleads with all His heart. It is God Himself who says, "O Israel, return unto the Lord your God." It is not a chill command—cold and sharp, like the sword of the Lord in the day of doom, but albeit it has all the force of a command, it is a warm and tender entreaty from the lips of love, "O Israel, return." In that "O" I seem to hear at once the weeping of the Lord Jesus, the sounding of the heart of the great Father, and the grieving of the Holy Spirit, "O Israel, return"! is a sorrowful, tender, gentle, wooing voice, which I beseech you to regard. Possibly some of you may have had to plead with one of your own children, who has been very willful, and has threatened to do that which would have been exceedingly injurious to him. You have said, "Oh, do not so, my son! Oh, do not so, my daughter!" and you have thrown your soul into your pleading. Even thus does God, with sacred pathos, with love welling up from the depth of His heart, plead with every sinner before me, and He words the pleading thus—"O Israel, return unto the Lord your God."

I would remind you, also, that, pathetic as it is, *it is a divine call*. "O Israel, return!" Who says it? The prophet? Yes, but more than the prophet; He who pleads is the prophet's God. The first motion towards reconciliation is never from the sinner, but always from God. The sinner does not cry, "O Lord, my God, permit me to return"; but the Lord Himself, who watches the wandering one, and sees him falling to his ruin, cries out, in the freeness of His grace, "O Israel, return!" What matters it to the Lord, though a man should even plunge down to hell? The Lord will be glorious, though the rebel perish. The Lord has no need of men. Yet the Lord thinks much of wandering men, and longs for their return. Out of the freeness and riches of His love He calls them to Himself. He swears by His own life that He wills not the death of the sinner, but that he turn to Him, and live. Because of His spontaneous love and pity, He cries, plaintively, "O Israel, return unto the Lord your God." Listen, then, my hearers. If it were *my* call, you might refuse it with small blame, but it is God's call; shall your Maker call in vain? Will you add to all your sin the turning of your back upon the God of love? Shall Jehovah cry in pity to your souls, and cry in vain? God grant it be not so! Here from this text, which, once written, remains, there sounds out of the eternal deep of boundless mercy this cry of grace; "O Israel, return unto the Lord your God!"

And so I will say no more about this call except that *it is evidently a very gracious one*. He puts it so, "Return unto the Lord *your God*." If you, O sinner, will return to the Lord, He will be your God; He will enter into covenant with you, He will give Himself over to you to be yours. Henceforth you shall have a property in Jehovah, and all the wealth of His infinite nature shall be yours. You shall be able to say, "This God is our God forever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death." That man has made a great speech who has truly said, "God is mine." There is more in calling God our God than if we could hold the title-deeds of both the Indies, or claim possession of the stars. God, in the infinity of His grace, declares, "I will be their God."

I cannot preach as I would. Who can compass such a theme as this? Oh, that you were wise, that you knew what was good for you! Then would you answer to this call. O sinner, how I wish that you were delivered from your madness! For then you would no longer turn your back upon your own blessedness, nor would you any longer reject the Lord your God to your own confusion. Your present course will lead you down to destruction utter and entire destruction, therefore, pause, I pray you! No, I say more; do not stay where you are, but return, return at once! See you not what a welcome God will give you? He says not, "Return unto your Judge," but "Return unto your God." It is not written, "Return like an escaped prisoner to your jailer, return to the whip and to the stocks," but, "Return unto the Lord your God." This God shall be your exceeding joy. Albeit I cannot put my soul into such words as I could wish, I am sure that men who are wise and prudent will think upon these things, and will be led to seek after the Lord, from whom all blessings flow. I remember how, when I perceived the freeness and preciousness of the gospel, I ran towards it, being drawn that way by a strong desire for that which promised such great things to me. May many a man and woman out of the present company say, "I will answer to the divine entreaty. Jehovah bids me return and return I will!"

II. Secondly, I beg you to notice THE ARGUMENT FOR COMING. "Return unto the Lord your God; *for you have fallen by your iniquity*." What a wonderful argument is this! You are in an evil plight through sin; therefore return to the Lord your God. "But," says one, "I was afraid I might not come because I had fallen." See how your fear is anticipated. The case is reversed, and your having fallen is made by the Lord into an argument why you should return to Him. "I am broken-kneed," says one, "I have fallen so badly that I shall never be worth a penny for any good work." Yet the Lord cries, "Return, for you have fallen." I hear one moaning, "I am broken to pieces by sin; I am like an old pot that has fallen on the stones. I am useless henceforth." For that very reason the Lord of mercy bids you return. "Return unto the Lord your God; for you have fallen." What ingenuity of mercy there is in the heart of God! See, He takes away the reason for despair, and makes out of it an argument for hope. Because you are thus fallen, you have need to return, and God considers your need, not your merit. Because you are fallen, God's pity invites you to return. Use the word "fallen" literally. If you are a fallen man, return; if you are a fallen woman, return. Why is it that the word "fallen" has a force in reference to woman which it has not in regard to man; surely a fallen man is as sad a sight as a fallen woman. But whether male or female, here is the argument for your returning to God, "You have fallen; therefore return." I pray you, yield to so gracious a plea.

Dear friends, the argument is also this; *the cause of your evil plight is sin*. "You have fallen *by your iniquity*." Sin is the root of the mischief. Do not say, "I was fated to be so." "You have fallen by your iniquity." It is true that you have fallen in Adam, but you have also fallen by your own actual sin, and you have enough to do to confess your own act and deed. Your own willful omissions and commissions have ruined you. You are wounded, but your own hand has given the injurious stab. "You have fallen by your iniquity"; blame no one else. That you are an unbeliever is your own fault; you will not come to Christ that you might have life. The way you follow is the way of your own choice, in which you follow the imaginations and devices of your own heart. All the misery of your present estate is due to yourself alone. "O Israel, you have destroyed yourself"! Feel that it is so, and confess it before God, taking to yourself shame and confusion of face.

The only remedy for your evil case is to come back to God. If you have fallen by your iniquity, you must be set free from this iniquity, but you cannot free yourself. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" You have lain in the lye of evil till you are dyed ingrain with the scarlet of iniquity, and the color cannot be taken out except by a miracle of grace. Only God can take away the spots from the leopard, and the blackness from the Ethiopian, and the crimson from the deep-dyed wool. The

Lord and only the Lord can work these marvels. Hence you are called upon to “return unto the Lord your God,” for your only hope of restoration lies in God Himself.

Your guilt should not make you hesitate, for the Lord knows all about it, and His invitation shows that He does so. He says, “Return; for you have fallen.” O my hearer, have you tried to hide that fall? Are you sitting here and trying to forget your ruin? The Lord does not forget it, and does not wish you to forget it. He sets it before your mind, and bids you come to Him as a fallen person. The Lord Jesus Christ receives sinners as sinners. He does not want them to change their character and then come, but they are to come to Him for a change. Come simply as sinners; not as awakened sinners, or sensible sinners, or sinners with some other good qualification. As sinners, come to Him who has come to save sinners. The Lord Jesus gave Himself for our sins; He never gave Himself for our righteousness, and therefore He would have us come to Him in all our defilement. Come in your evil habits, your guilt, your condemnation, your spiritual death, and your corruption. Come just as you are. He delights in mercy; leave space for mercy to work. “Return,” He says, “for you have fallen by your iniquity.”

If you are in the worst case that any mortal was in, *you have the best possible helper* to whom you are to return. If you go to Gilead for balm for your wound, you would turn that way in vain, for to the question, “Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?” the answer is, of course, there is neither balm nor physician there, or else the hurt of the daughter of My people would long ago have been healed. You have long enough gone to Gilead, now go to God. Human sources of help must fail you, and for that very reason we would persuade you to turn to God. There is no physician in Gilead, therefore, come along with you to Him whose touch is better than balm, who is Himself the health of souls. The very hem of His garment overflows with power, so that a touch is effectual. Jesus has but to cast an eye on the most guilty and forlorn, and they live. Yes, if they do but cast an eye on Him, they receive eternal life. A legion of devils will flee at His word. Oh, what a blessing it is that there is such a mighty Savior! If anybody here perishes, it is not because the Savior is not able to save him. If any man here shall die in his sin, it can only be accounted for by the Savior’s declaration, “If you believe not that I am He, you shall die in your sins.” “He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him.” “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” How intensely do I pray that you may return to God, urged by these reasons, namely, that you are helplessly, hopelessly lost, and Christ is a mighty Savior, on whom your help is laid! I would that for this reason you would come to Him, even this very day! He will receive you even now, for He has said it, “He that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out.”

III. Now let us see how our gracious God meets us, and provides for us THE HELP IN COMING.

The Lord helps our ignorance and our fear. *He gives us direction as to what to bring.* Read the second verse. “Ah!” says the sinner, “I do not know what to take with me in approaching the Most High. I have no bullocks, no lambs, no incense. In my hand there is no price of money or merit.” The answer is, “Take with you words.” Your heart is right; you are longing for salvation; you need not say, “How shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?” “Take with you words”; you have plenty of them. The heart must be there first, and then nothing more is asked than “words.” Cheap enough is this offering. Leaves of the forest are not so easy to come at. This is simple enough; He that has a tongue can bring words. O man and woman, whatever else you cannot bring, you can bring words, for indeed you have multiplied words to sin. The Lord helping you to return, you need not hesitate for want of an offering, since He says, “Take with you words.” This is but another version of our grand hymn—

*“Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to Your cross I cling;
Naked, come to You for dress;
Helpless, look to You for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die.”*

And then, the Lord helps the coming sinner by *a direction as to where to turn.* “Take with you words, and turn to the Lord.” “I wanted to see the minister,” says one. Turn to the Lord! “I desire to converse with a man of God.” Turn to the Lord! We read in the book of Job, “To which of the saints will you turn?” My answer would be—Sinner, turn to the sinner’s friend, and leave the saints alone. If you would be saved, turn not to Peter, nor James, nor John, but turn to Him whom all these call “Master and

Lord.” “Take with you words, and turn *to the Lord*.” Have you been in the habit of turning to a man who is called a priest? I pray you, do so no longer, for there is now but one sin-atonement priest, and He is the Lord Jesus. Have you turned to ceremonies? Do you look for rest in sacraments? You look that way in vain, for they are not the way of salvation. Turn rather to the Lord as He is revealed in the Lord Jesus. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord Himself. Against Him you have sinned; to Him make confession. You need that His anger should be turned away; seek, then, a free forgiveness from Him. It is His love that you need; go to Him for it, and He will receive you graciously, and love you freely.

A further help is this. The Lord helps us to return to Him by giving *a direction how to pray*. A minister said to me last Thursday evening what I have often felt to be true, “We had need make coming to Christ very plain, for many people are so ignorant that they almost need to have the words of confession and faith put into their mouths. They need somebody to kneel down side by side with them, and utter the very words that they should speak unto the Lord.” There is much more truth in this statement than inexperienced persons may think. So here the Lord does, as it were, put the words into the sinner’s mouth. “Take with you words, and say unto Him.” He says the words, that the sinner may make them His own, and say them after Him. In this condescending style He teaches the returning sinner how to pray. What a gracious God He is! Suppose a case. A great king has been grievously offended by a rebellious subject, but in kindness of heart he wills to be reconciled. He invites the rebel to sue for pardon. He replies, “O King, I would gladly be forgiven, but how can I properly approach your offended majesty? I am anxious to present such a petition as you can accept, but I know not how to draw it up.” Suppose this great king was to say, “I will draw up the petition for you,” what confidence the supplicant would feel in presenting the petition! He brings to the king his own words. He prays the prayer he is bidden to pray. By the very fact of drawing up the petition, the monarch pledged himself to grant it. O my hearer, the Lord puts it into your mouth to say this morning, “Take away all iniquity.” May you find it in your heart to pray in that fashion! That prayer is best which is offered in God’s own way, and is of God’s own prompting. May you present such a prayer at once!

Here I find *two sentences of petition*. The first is—“Take away all iniquity.” Follow me, and try to pray this prayer, “O You that take away the sin of the world, take away all my iniquity. It is great, but pardon it, I pray You, for You did bear our sins in Your own body on the tree. By Your precious blood, wash away all my iniquity! Let me know that You have carried my transgression away, even as the scapegoat carried the sins of Israel into the wilderness of forgetfulness. Take away all iniquity by an act of pardon, I beseech You. Take it away, also, in another sense—Lord, take it out of my heart; take it out of my life.”

Dear seekers, I pray you, do not look on one sin, and say, “Lord, spare it!” Do not wish to have one sin left, but cry “Take it away! Take it away! Take away *all* iniquity. However sweet, or fascinating, or deeply seated, Lord, take away all iniquity. If I have been given to the intoxicating cup, take it away! If I have been the slave of greed, take it away! If I have been subject to passion, or pride, or lustfulness, take it away! Whatever is my besetting sin, ‘take away all iniquity!’” Do you wish to have one fair sin spared to you? It will be your ruin. Hew in pieces that Agag sin that comes so delicately. Let your cry be, “Take it away!” The taking of it away may cost you a right hand or a right eye; still, shrink not, but cry, “Take away all iniquity.” Have done with it *all*. It will be of no use to give up one poison; if you take another poison, it will kill you. All sin must go, or else all hope is gone! Return to God, but it must be with a prayer which shows that you and your sins have fallen out, never to be reconciled.

The next petition is, “Receive us graciously.” Confess that a kind reception of you by God must be of grace alone. Nothing but grace can open a door for our returning. Sinners cannot be received of the Lord on any other terms but those of mercy. We would not ask to be dealt with according to our merits, but we thank the Lord that He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. As to our sins, we cannot answer Him one of a thousand. The Lord must receive us graciously or reject us righteously. Are we not glad that sinners can be received in the name of grace, and find a welcome in the tender mercy of our God? Offer, then, this petition, “Receive us graciously.” I am not content merely to talk to you about these gracious words; I want every soul here to use them in personal prayer. Oh, that the Lord would touch all lips by His grace, and lead them to say from the heart—“Lord, receive me, I return to You. Take away all iniquity, and take me to Yourself! Receive me as a subject of

Your kingdom. Receive me of Your grace into Your home of love. Receive me into the family of Your redeemed on earth, and then receive me into Your mansion in heaven. ‘Receive us graciously.’”

These are two sweet petitions, and they are fitly framed together. May the Holy Spirit constrain every heart to present them! May these be the words which every one of you shall take with him in returning to the Lord!

One sentence of promise follows these two of petition, “So will we render the calves of our lips.” What are the “calves of our lips”? They are sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. Yonder are the calves of the stall which men bring in sacrifice; they are struck down, and they die at the altar. God does not ask us for bullocks which have horns and hoofs. He takes no pleasure in the blood of calves, or of goats. He desires a broken heart, true faith, and humble love; these live at the altar. “Whoso offers praise glorifies God.” Let us bring Him our best thoughts, our best expressions, our best testimonies, our heartiest praises; these are not calves of our stalls, but “calves of our lips.” Let our gratitude be a living sacrifice, and our conduct a constant testimony to the goodness of God. I think we can say this morning—at least, I can—“Lord, if You will spare me, I will speak for You.” I must do so during the rest of my life, or else I shall have to change my ways and habits. I was thinking, as I came along this morning, that it is somewhere about forty years since I first opened my mouth to preach for Christ, and I can still say what I have often said—

*“Ever since by faith I saw the stream
His flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.”*

Is there not some young man here who will begin at once to take up this service for the next forty years? I wonder what young man it is that I may lay hands upon for Jesus? And some Christian woman—no, she is not a Christian, yet, but I call her such, for she is going to be, I am only anticipating a little—will she not now become a Christian, and straightaway render unto the Lord Jesus the calves of her lips, by bearing her testimony to her family and among her acquaintances? Who will consecrate himself this day unto the Lord? While you cry to God for mercy as to the past, resolve that if you are saved you will confess His name, and so offer Him the calves of your lips. The Lord claims your hearts first, and your lips next. You must confess Christ before men. Salvation is promised to a confessed faith; always remember that, “He that with his heart believes, and with his mouth makes confession of Him, shall be saved.” “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” Faith should be confessed in God’s own way, by baptism, and to that faith the promise is specially given. Though I doubt not that some may be saved who do not make an open avowal of their faith, yet the promise runs as I have quoted it, and I would not have you willfully forget the command implied in it. “He that confesses Me before men, him will I confess before My Father which is in heaven”; so says the Lord Jesus. It is no more than His due, that we should take up our cross and follow Him. It is but a small thing, that if we trust in His name, we should bear His name. So you see the Lord puts into our mouths this morning this resolve, that we will praise Him. “So will we render the calves of our lips.”

Now come *three sentences of renunciation*, “Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, You are our gods.” First, the natural, legal trust, so much esteemed among men, must go. Israel used always to fall back upon Assyria. If Egypt threatened the people, or if any other nation oppressed them, they sent a present to the King of Assyria to come and deliver them. But now they cry, “Asshur shall not save us.” The popular trust of the world is in self-righteousness in its various forms. You were going to be saved by your own repentance, reformation, and future well-doing, but of this you must say, “Asshur shall not save us.” Are you trusting in sacraments? Give up so vain a confidence. They are not meant to save, but to instruct those who are saved already. Are you trusting in your hereditary godliness, your birthright religion? Away with so poor a foundation! Are you trusting in your prayers, your giving to the poor, your attendance on sermons, your honesty, your good nature? Set these on one side, and cry, “Asshur shall not save us.” All confidences must go except Jesus Christ, whom God has laid in Zion for a foundation stone. On Him must we build, and on none other, for “Asshur shall not save us.”

But, next, they gave up all carnal confidence of their own, “neither will we ride upon horses.” The kings of Israel were forbidden to multiply horses, because they were not used in commerce, but only for

military purposes, and Jehovah would not have His people rely upon these creatures. Egypt might glory in horse and chariot, but Israel must not do so. Hence we find pious Hezekiah keeping this law so strictly that Rabshakeh reviled him by offering to send two thousand horses if he could set riders upon them. When we come to God we must quit all trust in ourselves of every sort; in our tears, our prayers, our moral life, our excellent instincts, or anything else we must place no trust. "Some trust in horses, and some in chariots, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." It may be you have fine horses of morality and religiousness; you have many virtues upon which you think you might fairly depend; give up these trusts. Have you been lately trotting out your horses before your own family, and saying to your wife, "I am not like many men. I never drink too much, neither do I treat my household unkindly"? Put away these horses. You cannot come to God riding in pride. Say, "We will not ride upon horses." Put away every confidence in yourself, in whatever fashion it appears.

One more stroke of renunciation remains. Down must go the gods of our former estate. He that would come to the true God must have done with the false gods. If we have been living for any objectives save the glory of God, we must do away with those objectives. If we have been paying religious reverence to anything but God Himself, we must do away with it. "Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, You are our gods." It seems strange that men should ever have said such a thing, but since they have said it, they must say it no more. God help everyone here to now make a complete renunciation of everything which usurps the place of God! Whether it is an object of trust, reverence, desire, fear, or love, we must cast it down, and worship God alone. He says to us, "Look unto Me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." In the work of salvation the work of our hands is out of court, and God alone must be glorified.

The words close with *one sentence of faith*. My time fails me, and I cannot dwell upon it at length. "In You the fatherless find mercy." Dear orphan boys below me, here is a word for you. Remember it, and love God because it is true, "In You the fatherless find mercy." God is the Father of the fatherless. Now, if God receives the fatherless, who have none to take care of them, and He becomes their God, we may be encouraged to come to Him, even in the most forlorn condition. Does God keep open house for those who have no home? Then I will go to Him. Does God take up those whom father and mother have forsaken? Then will I put my trust in Him. I saw on a board this morning words announcing that an asylum was to be built on a plot of ground, for a class of persons who are described in three terrible words—"HELPLESS, HOMELESS, HOPELESS." These are the kind of people that God receives; to them He gives His mercy. Are you helpless? He will help you. Are you homeless? He will house you. Are you hopeless? He is the hope of those who have no other confidence. Come, then, to Him at once!

IV. This last word should induce sinners to return to God, and then we shall see before our eyes THE COMING BY THIS HELP. You that are great, and good, and full, and inwardly strong, you will not return to God. You that are nothing, and less than nothing, you that are fallen in your own sight, you that cannot help yourselves, you are likely to come; I pray that you may come at once. I have set before you an open door that no man can shut; will you not enter? Come to my Lord this day. Come now and say, "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." May God help us to be doing this, rather than talking and hearing about it!

Let us come to God, for He will help us to come. You see He helps us by giving us words, but as He never helps men to be hypocrites, He will also help us to feel the words. He, who gives us words to speak, will give us grace to speak them sincerely. Are not these words the true desires of your hearts? On your knees, when you get home, pour them out before God. In your pews while you are here, present these petitions in silence. Say, "Take away all iniquity, receive me graciously: so will I render the calves of my lips." The Lord's help will suffice, not only to teach us the manner of praying, but to give us the desire, the faith, the love, the resolve which make up this prayer.

Let your coming to the Lord be decisive and actual. You have meant it for years, and yet nothing has been done. Some of you have been hearing me preach now for a quarter of a century. Think of that! I met, the other day, with one who heard me at New Park Street, and at last he has come out to confess his Lord after more than thirty years. Slow work this! Better late than never. Come, my friends, are you going to stick in the mud forever? Will you lie outside the wicket-gate throughout another year? God grant you may cry right now, "Take away all iniquity: receive us graciously!"

Oh, that this might be the universal cry of all my audience at this hour! The text is not written as for one, but for many. “Take with you words.” The first verse is in the singular, and speaks of “you,” but the second is in the plural, and speaks of “us.” It is not, “Take away all iniquity; receive *me* graciously”; but, “receive *us* graciously: so will *we* render the calves of *our* lips. Asshur shall not save *us*.” Come along with you, then, the whole company of you who desire salvation. I call upon you who are sitting in this first gallery all around me! I call upon the dense mass in the area below! I call upon you who sit in the upper gallery! Oh, that we might all join in one common return unto the Lord! Let us call this day, “*The day of the joyous return.*” “Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for He has torn, and He will heal us; He has smitten, and He will bind us up.” Who says, “No”? What? Will you choose your own destruction, and persevere in the way of sin? I hope you will all say, “Yes,” and that the Holy Spirit will lead you to carry out the resolve.

The special call is to the fallen, “Return; for you have fallen.” Come, you fallen ones, come and welcome. It is to the wandering for to such is the command appropriate which says, “Return.”—

*“Return, O wanderer, to your home
Your Father calls for you;
No longer now an exile roam
In guilt and misery;
Return! Return!”*

The call is to the forlorn and destitute, “In You the fatherless find mercy.” You that are fallen, far off, fatherless, and forlorn, come at once to God in Jesus Christ. Come now! Come! Come! Come! See how the Lord meets you! Read the fourth verse; I could almost kiss the lines as I gaze on them, “I will heal their backsliding”; come, sick one, here is healing for you. “I will love them freely”; come, unlovely one, here is love for you. “My anger is turned away from him”; though you have felt His wrath burning in your souls, it is gone forever. “I will be as the dew unto Israel”; before this service is quite over, some drops of dew shall have fallen upon your parched spirits, and shall sparkle in your bosoms like diamonds glittering in the sun.

These later verses speak as if the gracious work were done; they describe a scene most bright, full of color, and rich with perfume, as a fact accomplished. The chapter begins with an exhortation, but it runs into description, as if the people really had come, and God had met them, and had blessed them exceedingly. Lord, make it so at this very moment! May it not be merely that I have preached, and that these people have listened most encouragingly, but may men be really saved through grace! The Lord’s people have been praying all the while, “God bless Your servant”; and now I shall look for fruit from this first of March. The Lord grant that this March may come in like a lamb to many of you! May the lion go out of you! May a heavenly wind spring up and blow across this city, and bring soul-healing with it! In this hope, I bid you again, “Come to Jesus.” Jesus says, “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.” “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come. And whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.” The Lord gather you all into the arms of His grace, for His Son’s sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—HOSEA 13 and 14.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—907, 589, 600.

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